

October 28, 2016 ***Sugar, Saints and Souls*** Milepost 181

Halloween is now the second largest retail holiday in the United States! In the church year, it is simply the hallowed evening before the main event. Both All Saints' Day (Nov. 1), and All Souls' Day (Nov. 2), began in the Middle Ages, with roots in the First Century Church.

In our sermon series in Acts, we have already noted the first martyr: Stephen (Acts 8). Each church had feasts on the anniversaries of the deaths of martyrs from their church. Initially, many martyrs were put to death at the same time, so there were not many feast days. Eventually, as many more were martyred, it became impossible to remember each anniversary. Nov. 1 was selected as the day to remember all martyrs. With thousands of our Anabaptist ancestors martyred in the 16th Century, doesn't it make sense for us to stop once a year, and celebrate the lives of the millions who have given their lives for the cause of Christ?

All Souls' Day was established around 1000 AD, to remember all the "faithful departed." Again, doesn't it make sense to for the church to take one day out of the year to remember the lives of all our Christian loved ones, who have gone before us to glory?

Both of these holy days have origins in an early church practice of writing the names of church members in a very ornate notebook called a diptych: both living members and those who died in the previous year. Diptychs were used in the liturgy of the early church.

H. Richard Niebuhr writes, "The great Christian revolutions came not by the discovery of something that was not known before. They happen when somebody takes radically something that was always there." That was certainly true of our Anabaptist ancestors: they simply rediscovered what the early church had known and practiced!

Our limited awareness of church history hinders the movement of the Holy Spirit today! The prophets of Israel frequently criticized the present order by calling on Israel to *remember*.

In 2000 years of Christian history, about 70 million have given their lives for the faith. Of these, 45.5 million were martyred in the last century. That gives us all the more reason to see the hallowed eve of

October 31, as just a prelude for All Saints' Day when we reverently remember the millions who gave their lives for the cause of Christ.

As we will note this Sunday, there was no ambiguity among the Apostles regarding their mission: *We are Jesus' followers who exist to tell everyone everywhere about Jesus.* (Who are we? Why do we exist?) Clarity of mission is what emboldened Jesus' followers, and enabled them to face martyrdom.

The four table group mission statements (Oct. 9) were merged by a task group into one proposed statement for congregational discussion (and action, if ready) on November 13:

Shalom Mennonite Church is a diverse community rooted in the Anabaptist Christian tradition. Together we follow Jesus as we worship God, grow in the Spirit, support one another, and share God's justice, peace and love with those around us and the world.

Please reflect prayerfully on the above mission statement, and bring your affirmation and/or specific suggestions for strengthening it. The statement as is, should ideally not be lengthened. It is meant to be concise. The mission statement approved by the congregation, will guide congregational vision work in January. The vision will name several specific and measurable goals for the next 3-5 years. Ideally, a vision statement should not exceed one page. It states *congregational* priorities, which are in sync with the mission statement.

Clarifying congregational mission and vision, is enhanced as we individually find clarity of calling and spiritual gifts. We will continue the spiritual gift discernment work at the Retreat, with a specific focus on our passion and personal style. If you missed the first session (offered in small groups during October), please see Gary for materials which will enhance your participation at the retreat.

Looking Ahead: "The Spread of the Gospel"

Oct. 30 9:30 a.m. *Why are we here?* Acts 13:44-14:3 Gary

12:20 p.m. Small group spiritual gift discernment (library)

Nov. 5 9am-5pm Retreat: *spiritual gift discernment, part 2*

Nov. 6 9:30 a.m. *Corresponding or Controlling?* Acts 15:1-33 Brian

Nov. 13 11:00 a.m. Congregational Dialogue: *Mission Statement*

Gary's projected in town schedule: Oct. 30-31; Nov. 5-7; 13-15.